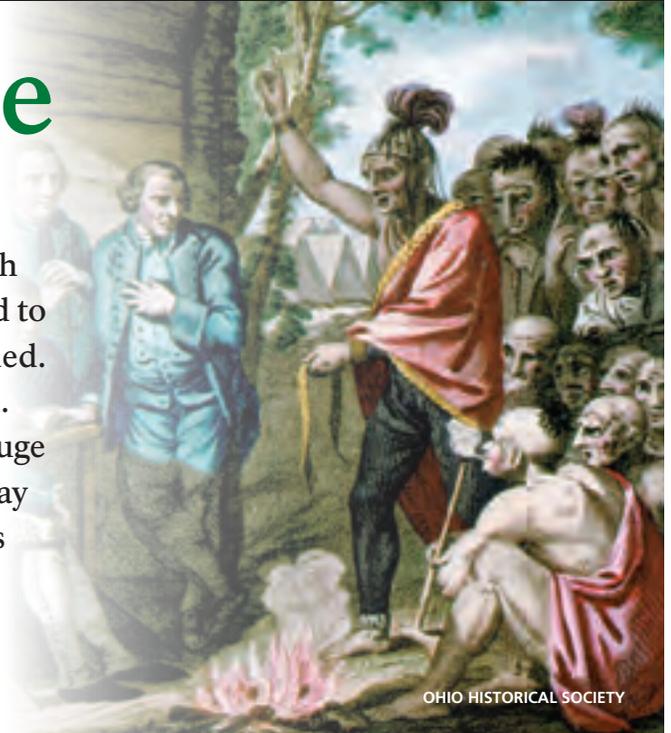




A Land of Refuge

In the 17th and 18th centuries, they were called Lenape, Oneida, Ottawa, and Wyandot. These tribes were no match for European diseases or colonists. An estimated one third to one half of their populations died, leaving villages weakened. Treaty after treaty added pressure for westward migration. Unable to defend their territories, these people sought refuge in the Ohio Country, present day northeast Ohio. Their stay was brief. The Ohio Country, coveted by Europeans for its land and by American Indians for its refuge, would be yet one more place where the battle for cultural integrity and existence would play out on this continent.



OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

A Home Away from Home



Statue of an American Indian using the Portage Path.
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When tribes seeking refuge arrived in the Ohio Country, they found relatively unoccupied land. The last permanent residents, the Whittlesey, had disappeared from the region in the early 1600s. Between the early 1600s and 1730, the valley had been used primarily as a transportation route for trade and hunting.

Travel Routes

American Indians traveled by land and waterway. The Mahoning Trail connected Fort Duquesne and Fort Sandusky, crossing the Cuyahoga River near Tinkers Creek. The Portage Path in Akron provided a route for an eight-mile portage over land between the Cuyahoga and Tuscarawas rivers. In times of abundant water, they traveled on the Little Cuyahoga to Summit Lake to shorten this portage to one mile.

The Cuyahoga Valley stirred back to life in the mid-1700s. Historic maps and oral histories indicate that the newly arriving American Indians settled throughout the Cuyahoga Valley. French missionaries note an Ottawa Village at the mouth of Tinkers Creek in Independence. A large Lenape camp, Old Cuyahoga Town, was just north of Portage Path in Akron. References mention an Ottawa village at Boston under the leadership of Chief Stigwanish and a Lenape village near Sand Run in Akron.

The Lenape were the most prominent group to settle in the area. Skilled farmers from the East Coast, they also utilized a hunting-and-gathering lifestyle that enabled them to move quickly when military or settlers arrived. Like other American Indian groups in the valley, they also traded with Europeans.

Supply and Demand



Beaver felt top hat, circa 1816.
OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

European desire for pelts brought traders and goods to the Ohio Country. The fur trade, established in the late 1660s, caused more American Indians to hunt in the valley and pulled tribes into a world market. Traders stationed at Fort Duquesne (now Pittsburg) and Riviere au Boeuf (in northwest Pennsylvania) brought cloth, clothing, metal kettles, metal tools, and rifles into the valley. American Indians traded pelts, bark canoes, corn, berries, meat, fish, and labor. Especially prized, beaver pelts were made into European hats and coats.

A 1755 map noted a trading post, known as the French House, along the Cuyahoga

River near Boston. Early historians noted that in 1744 George Croghan set up a trading post at a Seneca village east of the mouth of the Cuyahoga River. According to historians, Croghan earned respect from local tribes for his fairness, affability, and ability to converse in Indian languages.

Not all traders had a fair reputation. The cost of a rifle was a stack of beaver pelts as tall as the height of a rifle. Unscrupulous traders jumped on the stacked pelts to pack them down and produced longer barreled rifles. A cheap musket was worth \$12; the pelts, hundreds.

Shifting Alliances



Drawing of Fort Greenville.
OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Throughout the East and Midwest, American Indians were caught in a political tug-of-war. Forced to choose sides between the French and British in the 1750s French and Indian War and later between the British and Americans in the 1770s Revolutionary War, they shifted alliances based on who they considered to be the lesser evil. Their goal was to continue their trade networks while minimizing territorial loss.

Located between key forts, Ohio became a battleground. Frontier warfare was

bloody and destructive. All sides burned homes, destroyed supplies, massacred families, and harassed enemies.

While no large battles occurred in the Cuyahoga Valley, inhabitants repeatedly took part in raids into Pennsylvania and Virginia. Indian captive James Smith described a group of warriors who left the valley to raid a Pennsylvania settlement: “I was grieved to think that some innocent persons would be murdered . . .” The warriors returned with four horses and two scalps.

Moravians on the Cuyahoga



David Zeisberger, circa 1790-1799.
OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The experiences of Moravian missionaries and their Lenape followers illustrate the complexities of American Indian life in the Cuyahoga Valley. Missionaries John Heckewelder and David Zeisberger had established three Christian mission villages—Gnadenhutzen, Schoenbrunn, and Salem—along the Tuscarawas River about 75 miles south of the Cuyahoga Valley. A raid in 1781 by British-allied Wyandot Indians forced their removal to Sandusky. When a group of 150 returned home to Gnadenhutzen to collect food, they were massacred by Pennsylvania militiamen in retaliation for attacks on settlers that they did not commit.

In 1785, after a Congressional resolution returned the Tuscarawas villages to the Moravians, they again tried to return home. Attempting to return in winter, they met poor weather and decided to settle in

the Cuyahoga Valley at a place they called Pilgerruh or Pilgrims Rest. Here, along the banks of the Cuyahoga River and Tinkers Creek, they built temporary homes for 113 people. They fished, hunted the forest, farmed the land, and purchased supplies from Duncan and Wilson, traders traveling the Mahoning Trail.

But they did not feel safe. David Zeisberger wrote in his diary, “In the evening when it was already dark, we heard from afar a great uproar from white people and horses’ bells. We supposed it was the pack-horses with flour, but . . . the Indians . . . believed it to be the army . . . every soul of them fled to the bush . . .” Fearful of another massacre, they decided against returning to their homes along the Tuscarawas. On April 19, 1787 the group left Pilgerruh, loaded their canoes, and went in search of a new home.

Treaties and Broken Promises

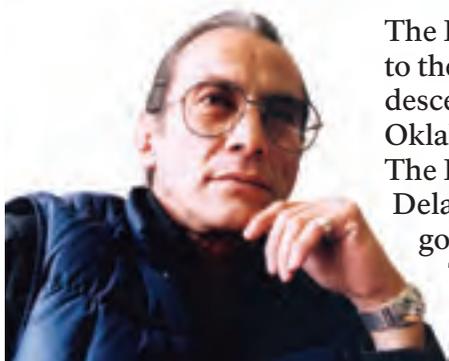


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Treaty after treaty divested American Indians of their Ohio Country lands. John Heckewelder noted their greatest complaint: “. . . at treaties, they charged them, with injuries they had done to the Americans; while they [the Americans] neither said a word, nor would hear anything about injuries they had done to Indians!”

American Indians forfeited all lands east of the Cuyahoga River when they signed the Treaty of Greenville in 1795. The result of a decisive loss to General Anthony Wayne at Fallen Timbers, near present day Maumee, Ohio, the treaty opened the Ohio Country to pioneers. In 1805 the United States government took the land west of the Cuyahoga River. Over the next 40 years, the United States government stole American Indian lands piece by piece.

Where is Home Today?



Ken Irwin, a leader of the Ohio Indian Movement, circa 1980-1995.
OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Lenape have the most historic ties to the Cuyahoga Valley. Many of their descendents live on two reservations in Oklahoma, Anadarko and Bartlesville. The Lenape, known today as the Delaware, are recognized by the federal government as having ties to Ohio. They are not the only ones. The Seneca, Shawnee, Wyandot, and Miami are also federally recognized tribes.

www.nps.gov/cuva
www.dayinthevalley.com

In the 1950s, a relocation program brought around 5,000 individuals representing 33 western tribes to the Cleveland area. Promised education, job training, and work, these American Indian groups created Indian centers and clubs to help preserve their cultures. Advocating for themselves, these new urban American Indians live throughout the area. A land that was once a temporary home to cultures and peoples struggling to survive European contact is home once again.